

**To the Presidents of Episcopal Conferences
and Superiors of Institutes of Consecrated Life
and Societies of Apostolic Life**

Last March I established the Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors, which had first been announced in December 2013, for the purpose of offering proposals and initiatives meant to improve the norms and procedures for protecting children and vulnerable adults. I then appointed to the Commission a number of highly qualified persons well-known for their work in this field.

At my meeting in July with persons who had suffered sexual abuse by priests, I was deeply moved by their witness to the depth of their sufferings and the strength of their faith. This experience reaffirmed my conviction that everything possible must be done to rid the Church of the scourge of the sexual abuse of minors and to open pathways of reconciliation and healing for those who were abused.

For this reason, last December I added new members to the Commission, in order to represent the Particular Churches throughout the world. In just a few days, all the members will meet in Rome for the first time.

In light of the above, I believe that the Commission can be a new, important and effective means for helping me to encourage and advance the commitment of the Church at every level – Episcopal Conferences, Dioceses, Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, and others – to take whatever steps are necessary to ensure the protection of minors and vulnerable adults, and to respond to their needs with fairness and mercy.

Families need to know that the Church is making every effort to protect their children. They should also know that they have every right to turn to the Church with full confidence, for it is a safe and secure home.

Consequently, priority must not be given to any other kind of concern, whatever its nature, such as the desire to avoid scandal, since there is absolutely no place in ministry for those who abuse minors.

Every effort must also be made to ensure that the provisions of the Circular Letter of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith dated 3 May 2011 are fully implemented. This document was issued to assist Episcopal Conferences in drawing up guidelines for handling cases of sexual abuse of minors by clerics. It is likewise important that Episcopal Conferences establish a practical means for periodically reviewing their norms and verifying that they are being observed.

It is the responsibility of Diocesan Bishops and Major Superiors to ascertain that the safety of minors and vulnerable adults is assured in parishes and other Church institutions. As an expression of the Church's duty to express the compassion of Jesus towards those who have suffered abuse and towards their families, the various Dioceses, Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life are urged to identify programmes for pastoral care which include provisions for psychological assistance and spiritual care. Pastors and those in charge of religious communities should be available to meet with victims and their loved ones; such meetings are valuable opportunities for listening to those who have greatly suffered and for asking their forgiveness.

For all of these reasons, I now ask for your close and complete cooperation with the Commission for the Protection of Minors. The work I have entrusted to them includes providing assistance to you and your Conferences through an exchange of best practices and through programmes of education, training, and developing adequate responses to sexual abuse.

May the Lord Jesus instil in each of us, as ministers of the Church, the same love and affection for the little ones which characterized his own presence among us, and which in turn enjoins on us a particular responsibility for the welfare of children and vulnerable adults. May Mary Most Holy, Mother of tenderness and mercy, help us to carry out, generously and thoroughly, our duty to humbly acknowledge and repair past injustices and to remain ever faithful in the work of protecting those closest to the heart of Jesus.

From the Vatican, 2 February 2015

Feast of the Presentation of the Lord

FRANCIS